



Do Diligence Sounding Board Report

To: Interested Parties

From: Eric Eckl, Water Words That Work, LLC

Re: Results of an Evaluation of the "Urge Your Legislators to Lead Georgia into a Sustainable Future" email petition

Date: 3/3/2009

Water Words That Work, LLC is preparing to launch a new market research service -- tentatively titled the "Do Diligence Sounding Board" -- for nature protection and pollution control organizations to use to evaluate marketing materials and messages.

The purpose of this forthcoming service is to allow you to **quickly** and **affordably** pre-test materials *before* they are final -- giving you an opportunity to improve your piece before you release it into the wild. Once the service launches, Water Words That Work, LLC will provide DDSB feedback to our clients in complete confidence.

As part of our field trials for this forthcoming service, we tested 6 petitions and other issue advocacy pieces produced by not-for-profit environmental organizations. This report summarizes what 25 "everyday citizens" have to say about the "Urge Your Legislators to lead Georgia into a Sustainable Future" email petition produced by the Georgia Environmental Action Network. To see the email, point your browser to:

<http://docs.google.com/fileview?id=0BzW9NjG8hQoCY2Q0MzUxZmYtMDdhNy00NzEyLWE4YzItNWRIYzVkn2Q5Nzhi&hl=en>

By the Numbers

With an overall average of 2.82, this piece earned the lowest marks from the sounding board. In a nutshell, it seems that the sounding board finds the subject to be important, but the message itself to be vague. In other words, it is the email itself that earns the low marks, not the issue that it seeks to address.

Statement	1-Strongly Disagree	2-Somewhat Disagree	3-Somewhat Agree	4-Strongly Agree	Average for this Piece	Average for similar pieces
The piece gets my attention	0	2	7	15	2.56	3.03
The piece has a clear message	0	2	5	17	2.88	3.36
The piece is believable	0	1	6	17	3.28	3.38
The issue important to society	0	2	5	17	3.28	3.18
The issue affects me or somebody I care about	5	7	9	3	2.64	2.51
It is urgent to address this issue now	0	3	7	14	2.40	2.86
I could take this action if I chose	0	3	10	11	3.28	3.29
I am confident that it would make a difference if I did	5	12	5	2	2.48	2.46
If I take this action, I'm confident that others will do their part	4	14	4	2	2.60	2.46

Their Initial Reaction

Question: "Pick one word that summarizes the feeling this piece evokes in you:"

They answered:

- "concerned."
- "positive."
- "upset."
- "Inspired."
- "na."
- "Ashamed."
- "Ineffective."
- "mad".
- "Motivated."
- "Affectionate."
- "Indifferent."
- "responsability."
- "uninformed."
- "ambivalent."
- "bored."
- "helpful."
- "alert."
- "good."
- "interested."
- "weary."
- "Frustrated."
- "Concerned."
- "Curious."
- "reassured."
- "confused."

Your Message in Their Words, Part I

Question: "In your own words, what is the issue here:"

They answered like this:

- "The sustainable and equitable handling of Georgia's water issues."
- "Conservation in Georgia (water)."
- "the people are unhappy with what is happening and are trying to come up with a solution."
- "The need to conserve the environment needs and water supply in Georgia, and transit funding."
- "na."

- "Our legislators are considering a rollback of certain environmental policies that may have a positive effect on some businesses will in turn have a very large and negative impact on Georgia's water supply."
- "Leading Georgia into sustainability in the future. What sort of sustainability remains uncertain, but I'm fairly sure it has something to do with the water and the trees. I just moved from Savannah recently, btw. I did not know there was a problem with the water or the trees."
- "Politics."
- "Efforts to clean up the environment are constantly being delayed by legislative actions. In order to protect the world for future generations, it is imperative that people contact their Legislators and urge them to work on these issues."
- "The issue is that the writer wants to go before the legislation and have them listen and understand that protecting Georgia's Environment is a serious issue that needs to be addressed."
- "Environmentalism."
- "The Georgia General Assembly is trying to make us understand the need to keep our own environment clean and the ways that we can help them to provide a sustainable future. "
- "A group of environmental organizations has identified four conservation-related issues to contact Georgia legislators about."
- "The issue at hand is an effort to focus legislators' efforts on a few key environmental issues, principally dealing with water conservation and water/air purity."
- "Saving the environment in the state of Georgia through political action, especially as relating to water conservation."
- "The issue here is to make sure that the matters pertaining to securing funding for transit, for water conservation, and other environmental issues are brought to the attention of legislators at the Georgian General Assembly. They want you to sign up to make sure you make it known that you support this."
- "The issue here deals with Conservative management of Georgia's water needs."
- "The issue in the article is to help the environment and to mainly make Georgia a safer and cleaner place."
- "The issue here is advocating a sustainable future for the State of Georgia by asking people to lobby state legislators to support four issues that the group favors."
- "Legislation on Georgia water conservation."
- "The issue is pressuring the GA state legislature to accept its agenda which deals with continued (high levels of) spending, water management, and transit funding."
- "The issue is that lawmakers need to come together and take responsibility for environmental issues. They need to help ensure that Georgia can have a sustainable future and preserve its state's natural resources. Through making laws and policy that would address the environmental issues within the state"
- "The issue is that Georgia's legislators need to be informed of what actions to take in order to improve and protect Georgia's environment."
- "A petition for Georgia to refine their watershed usage"

- "Georgia needs to work towards a sustainable future, with water conservation and effective water management."

Your Message in Their Words, Part II

Question: "The group that produced this piece is encouraging you to exercise your rights as an American citizen. In your own words, how can you influence the outcome of this situation?"

They answered like this:

- "By contacting the appropriate representative and making my voice heard."
- "contact my local politician's and other elected and appointed official's."
- "the people must show that they are unhappy with what has transpired and move as a group to fix the problems they are facing."
- "There is a link that allows you to "act now" and show support for this campaign. Taking this action makes you a part of the movement to turn these efforts into reality."
- "na"
- "Writing e-mails, making phone calls and sending letters to our state legislators is one way we can help. Organizing protest's and attending town hall meetings and other political sessions is another way to help this organization have a successful conclusion"
- "Telling legislators about the 'environmental community's shared priorities." I can best influence this presumably by clicking the button. I'm not sure what a lot of these phrases mean "Secure stable funding for transit"?
Who and what is it that is being transited, and why should I care?."
- "Spread the word."
- "By contacting my legislators about the stated issues"
- "I could post it on blogs, forward it, etc. The problem is I don't live in Georgia so I do not know if I could actually participate myself"
- "You can use your right as an American citizen to get anything done if you try"
- "I, as an american citizen, i could ask my state legislators to support the priorities that the Georgia General Assembly is promoting with within the "Leading Georgia into a sustainable future" program."
- "The organizations want me to contact my legislators to try to convince them to work on the four issues they have identified"
- "The group wants to encourage readers to contact the legislature and forward the piece to friends and associates. Via these methods, the citizen can exert influence on the legislative process to achieve the desired ends."
- "By contacting my legislators in Georgia and urging them to follow the actions that are stated by the organization, by completing the signing of the petition which will also be submitted to the same legislators, and other similar actions"
- "These people want you to let your legislators know that you support the sustainability program in Georgia, by clicking a link that will probably add your name to a petition of some sort (but the link didn't work right, so I don't know)"

- "I could influence the outcome of this situation by becoming involved with the campaign to ensure that the State Governing officials are aware of what is important in regards to water management."
- "I could influence the outcome of the situation by telling others about what they are doing. I could also start my own little group for my community and follow the guidelines that they have"
- "The group is asking people to "click" on a link in the e-mail to send a message to state legislators that you support the four issues that the group favors"
- "I can hit the 'act now' button to send an email to a legislator outlining the steps they should take in the legislative session"
- "By contacting my (if I was Georgian) legislator. One means would be to use the Act Now button"
- "Encourage my state and the nation as a whole to protect its national resources by writing local congressmen, volunteering my time to organizations that will support these principles, and helping to educate others about water preservation"
- "As a political science major, I understand the fundamentals of representative government as well as the rights of American citizens. Representatives operate on a schedule of election and re-election, so their public perception is paramount on their agenda. Issues of legislative importance only become such if they are presumed to enhance this public image. Thus, voters can influence the outcome of this situation by making the issue more of a public importance. By launching a public relations campaign, organizing a grassroots movement, or overemphasizing the negative effects that ignoring the issue at hand could create, more voters will become impassioned, leaving the legislators with no choice but to give the environment more attention."
- "This petition exercises a citizens right over the government, so if enough of us sign it, the governing body would have to do something about the issues presented"
- "I can tell my legislators that I support this, and I can let my friends and family know that they too can click on the link to report to their legislators."

Implications for Self or Family

Question: "Please share your thoughts on how this issue has or hasn't affected you or someone you care about:"

They answered like this:

- "At this point, it's admittedly abstract for me, in that I have not had direct experience with it on a tangible level. Still, it is an issue I care about."
- "I am not in Georgia, but understand clean water affect's everyone"
- "i dont know anyone in this area or with this problem so it has not affected me or anyone i know"
- "I don't personally live in Georgia, but my husband has family there. Clean water in abundance is absolutely necessary to sustain life"
- "na"
- "I care deeply about our environment and we are all effected every day wether we notice or not by breathing in unclear air and by climate change."

- "Telling legislators about the 'environmental community's shared priorities." I can best influence this presumably by clicking the button. I'm not sure what a lot of these phrases mean "Secure stable funding for transit"?
Who and what is it that is being transited, and why should I care?."
- "Its a sad issue."
- "Clean water is something we enjoy every day, and if I want my children to enjoy the same it must become a priority in the political sphere."
- "It hasn't affected anyone I know first hand. BUT -- protecting the planet is important, so I feel strongly toward the issue."
- "I dont live anywhere near Georgia"
- "at this moment, it's not affecting me much, but i'm sure that if we do not take the actions we will suffer the consequences."
- "If by "this issue" you mean the need for water conservation planning and transit funding.... I live in the Tampa area. Both water issues and transit funding are important here. We essentially have no mass transit system in Hillsborough County, and nearly unbridled development is causing water shortages"
- "Clean and adequate water is a significant issue for all Americans. During times of drought, there are frequent calls to conserve water, and this affects all of us, especially those of us from rural areas, who may have gardens or livestock."
- "The environment effects everyone, but I don't believe that this effects us in the way that environmental action groups would have us believe. I do want the world to be nice and clean though, and pollution has limited that in certain places in the world and it would be nice to get rid of that"
- "Although I'm nowhere near Georgia and this doesn't affect me or anybody I know, I do realize the importance of water conservation which is something people need to be made more aware of all over the world"
- "We live now in an area that has problems with the water. To me, it is very important that we ensure that our water is safe for us, for our families and for future generations"
- "To be honest this issue has not affected me at all or anyone near me in any way."
- "Clean water, adequate mass transit, equitable use of water resources are issues that are important everywhere in the country."
- "Water conservation affects everyone - what happens in Georgia will impact what happens in Oregon, and vice versa"
- "Since I don't live in Georgia, it doesn't really affect me. That being said, I'm not a big fan of transit systems that don't work (like my city's--Minneapolis), although I love transit systems that DO work (Chicago Transit Authority, NYC Subway)."
- "this has effected everyone Im currently located in the state of California we have seen such an increase in water prices due to the lack of resources to water. Also there have been so many areas of drought. if one goes ot national resources and glaciers many of these areas have been greatly affected and have dried out it natural resources."
- "As a strong proponent of protecting the environment, I have always been in support of legislation that improves the quality of life for all and respects both the Earth and those living on it. I actively participate in Green movements, so this issue affects me as it does the other citizens of Georgia."

- "Not enough information about how this affects anyone, it could be that there's nuclear waste in the water, or too much salt. Either way this affects everyone, and should be dealt with."
- "Our entire planet needs to work on sustainability before everyone uses up all of our resources. Sustainability is a huge global issue."

Shop Talk vs. Plain English

Question: "Imagine that your friends, coworkers, or family member are looking at the piece themselves. If there are any words or phrases that might be difficult for them, please share them below:"

They answered like this:

- "I come from a pretty educated bunch, so everything would probably be pretty clear. "
- "No, it is very clear and simple to understand. I enjoyed it and my friend's and family would probably also easily understand and enjoy the article."
- "na"
- "I am confused about "Secure Stable Funding for Transit"? The piece is talking mostly about water and rollbacks and this line just doesn't explain itself enough.
- How are these policy changes going to lead Georgia into a sustainable future?
- What is a sustainable future? Why should we want one?
- What are the negatives if these events occur? Rollbacks etc.."
- "I imagine they'd be something like me and skim it before throwing it away. It's not effectively persuasive or even very clear. Kind of like reading a bumper sticker in traffic - it's just too non-impacting."
- "No."
- "I am not sure, honestly. I don't think anything is "difficult" about it, I just think that there needs to be a better summary of the issues."
- "They did not. "
- "rollback
- Complicated first sentence -- simplify it and give it more punch.
- Slogan "What we're really....." is way tooooo long!"
- ""Rollbacks" requires an explanation. Rolling back of previous environmental laws or requirements? If so, specifics are required for one to understand what the term means in this context. "
- "Can't think of anything here."
- "I don't know what accept no rollbacks really means, so perhaps some of the people I know won't either. Otherwise, it's fairly easy to understand."
- "none i could think of."
- ""No rollbacks" and "sustainable future" are terms that might be unfamiliar or difficult for some people."
- "transit"
- ""Accept No Rollbacks" is a little unclear--I assume you mean spending rollbacks, but on what?"

- "The common Sue or John may be unfamiliar with "rollbacks."
- ""rollbacks" "secure stable funding" .

Strengths of the Piece

Question: " In your opinion, what is the strongest or most compelling thing about this piece?"

They answered like this:

- "The way that it ties the issue in to every day life, connecting it with concrete images and experiences."
- "clean water"
- "There is a solution to the problem but nothing is being done to implement it"
- "The most compelling thing about this piece would be the phrase at the top of the page "What we're really trying to do is conserve a way of life." This sends a clear message to the importance of this campaign."
- "na."
- "The fact that state legislators are even considering rollbacks of enviromental policies and protections is downright scary to me."
- "The 'Act Now' button. I'm not being flip.
I think it's the general tone - kids playing on a swing, by the river. It doesn't demonstrate anything urgent. I realize that the theme is to preserve what is, I'm just not feeling moved by it in any way at all."
- "The numbers "
- "The importance of sustainability is the most compelling thing."
- "I really liked how it listed the organizations that are involved."
- "It was put together good. "
- "The stongest thing about this piece is that people actually trying to do something about this problem. "
- "Many respected environmental organizations have joined together to focus on a few issues. The Act Now button is a good idea, though it's not clear just what would happen if I clicked on it."
- "The strongest point is the graphic and verbiage at the masthead of the piece. "
- "Probably the pictures that show people enjoying outdoor activities in a nice, clean, green place."
- "The most compelling part to me is the list of organizations which are supporting this issue. That gives it a lot more credibility. "
- "The strongest point in this piece is in regards to Conserving our water for future needs. "
- "The strongest point in the piece is how important it is to them to acheive this goal."
- "The strongest thing about the piece is the pictures at the top with the tagline "What we're really trying to do is conserve a way of life" - this gets people's attention."
- "It began with a friendly "dear eric"
- "I like hte act now button--it makes it easy."
- "the avocacy groups that stand in support to protect the resources and the enviornment."

- "The most compelling thing about the piece are the solutions. They make up the meat of the piece, and it is a strong point to have them repeated throughout. It paints a clear message of what needs to be done and is simple enough for a common Sue or John to remember and repeat to others. "
- "There really wasn't much compelling in this."
- "I can't really find anything overly compelling about this piece. Basically, the problem is listed without any emotion or hard facts, and "leading Georgia into a Sustainable Future" is really vague to me. "

Weaknesses of the Piece

Question: " In your opinion, what is the weakest thing about this piece?"

They answered like this:

- "It's no fault of the piece, but I responded with a general sense of skepticism when thinking about how Georgia legislators will respond to this issue. "
- "This is an excellent article, I have no complaint's."
- "theres not much background info"
- "There is a bit of redundance in the bullets. Perhaps rephrasing the items in the second set of bullets would be more enticing."
- 'na"
- "There just isn't enough content and there is nothing that really jumps out at you. This issue is a life or death issue and I believe it should be printed that way."
- "Accpet no rollbacks? What does this even mean? I consider myself fairly sophisticated about the environment and sustainability and this piece of jargon is utterly wasted on me.

I think that whoever wrote this is likely too close to the issue. As it stands, I don't really know what the issue is, other than the general want to save the trees and water. That's like trying to be nice. We are all interested in it as a concept, but hardly feel any urgency to get it done."

- "The response ."
- "It does not have much more information on the issue or how change might be accomplished. It is just a plea to contact the legislators."
- "I don't think it summarizes what the issue is well. For example, if they wanted to protect water sources, animals, and create green energy, there should have been a couple of nicely written paragraphs stating this."
- "Im not interested in it. "
- "The weakest point about this thing is that the legislators can or cannot agree with this matter."
- "It doesn't explain what actual action is implied by the four issues. What legislation is proposed? What are "rollbacks"? Why are these four items at issue? Why these four now? There should be links for each item to longer explanations of the issues and history involved.

You say that Georgia legislators "need to know what steps they can take to positively impact Georgia's environment" but I don't see what those steps are!"

- "The piece fails to make a compelling argument for action, because it fails to provide and background information (for example, recent drought or environmental contamination issues). Stating the bullet points twice in such a short piece twice is not helpful, and seems a little odd. "
- "Talking about points of water conservancy that are somewhat irrelevant in comparison to larger issues."
- "They restate their objectives as their solution. To me that would have worked better if they had elaborated on each one a little. "Accept no rollbacks" what do you mean by that?"
- "The weakest thing in this piece to me is in regards to rollbacks."
- "The weakest point is how the way it looks and gets your attention."
- "The weakest thing about the piece is a lack of any specific information on the four issues that the group favors. The statements are generalities - you really don't know what specific pieces of legislation you are supporting when you read the piece, and that makes it difficult to take action and "click" on "act now:".
- "It didn't explain what was meant by stable transit/transportation. Is that transit for the water, which water, from where? And it repeated the 4 steps to outline twice. Its a written document - we can just look up to review what they were!"
- "It's a little muddied--you want a number of things which aren't related."
- "There should be more information about this topic. It should give an example of how this will affect the community for example everyone has had to conserve on water due to the drought that has effected Georgia."
- "The weakest thing about this piece is that it did not detail why this issue must be resolved NOW. I have written several policy briefs before, and that should always be the number one concern. WHY NOW? The opening of the piece should be an attention grabber - try opening with an alarming statistic or fact that makes the reader feel personally affected. Sometimes, dramatics are necessary. Since I did not feel that throughout the piece, I felt curious as to why this issue was of "immediate importance," which weakened the piece."
- "There wasn't enough information given, on the problem, or the solution."
- "I don't fully understand the issues. The piece mentions water conservation, but doesn't explain a possible solution. And "Accept No Rollbacks" and "Secure Stable Funding" don't make sense to me. I don't understand what they mean. Water management is not clear either, no solution is mentioned."

About the Do Diligence Sounding Board

Just whose opinions are these, anyway? The "Do Diligence Sounding Board" is a standing body of U.S. residents who provide feedback on marketing materials and perform related tasks in return for payment.

A major corporation recruits the board members, maintains the system for securing their feedback, and handles the financial transactions. Water Words That Work, LLC pays to access to this service, as do other marketing firms.

The feedback that you receive from the sounding board is different from feedback you receive from your peers, for three reasons:

- The sounding board members who review your materials approach them like actual everyday citizen "in the wild." They are not professionals in the field and have not participated in the drafting of the materials.
- The sounding board members have never met you, and will provide their feedback anonymously. Their feedback will not be influenced by their personal relationship with you.
- The sounding board more closely approximates the demographic makeup (especially race and education) of the U.S. "public" than the staff and board of most nature protection and pollution control organizations.

Demographic Trait	Environmental Professionals	Do Diligence Sounding Board	Traditional Telephone Poll, U.S. Sample	Actual U.S. (Census)
4 Year College Degree	95% or higher	~50%	~40%	24%
White/Caucasian	95% or higher	~80%	~80%	79%

All sounding board answers are verbatim -- including spelling and typographic errors.

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